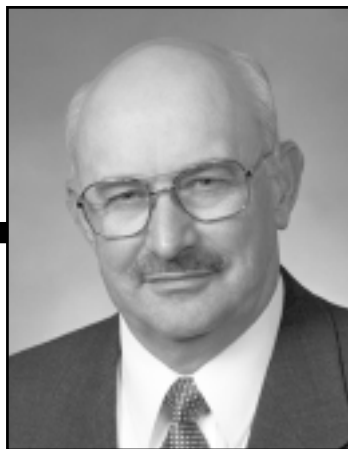




Rep. Mary Skinner



Rep. Jim Clements

14th District



2004 Session-End Report

Spring 2004

Dear friends,

It's said that governing is about the art of compromise. We were reminded of that many times during the recent 60-day legislative session in Olympia.

A lot of compromising took place in the course of reaching decisions on important issues before us — such as job creation, health care, public safety and our state's primary election system.

We were encouraged by legislative support for the Agendas. Of course, there were disappointments, too. Costs of liability insurance are climbing, but the House and Senate couldn't come to an agreement that would reform our civil justice system.

This newsletter offers a snapshot of the work done during those 60 days, and the tasks that lie ahead. It has been a great privilege to serve as your state representatives these past two years.

Sincerely,

Mary Skinner
360-786-7810

Jim Clements
360-786-7856

P.S. – Because this is an election year, state law says we can't send you another newsletter like this until after the November election. However, we are allowed to respond to your specific issues, so don't hesitate to get in touch with us!

Toll-free hotline: 1-800-562-6000

Action taken to create jobs, revitalize our economy

With Yakima County's unemployment rate hovering just under 11 percent, it is no wonder that citizens who responded to our recent government survey said the economy and jobs are their Number 1 priority. This remains our priority, as well.

During the 2004 session, we took action on several bills to preserve existing jobs and create a climate that will attract new jobs to Yakima County and to our state.

We renewed two tax breaks for high-tech research and development companies, which provide high-wage jobs. We also approved a temporary business tax break aimed at saving jobs at aluminum smelters, a sales tax exemption for computer equipment used in printing and publishing, and an extension of the state ban on local taxation of Internet service providers.

We adopted legislation to help small businesses with 50 or fewer employees offer their workers a lower-cost package of health care options and benefits.

As ranking Republican of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee, Mary focused her attention toward passing several job-creating bills. She co-sponsored House Bill 2784, which creates a small business incubator program to assist and provide grants for start-up companies and firms that are located in economically distressed or disadvantaged areas.

Another measure she co-sponsored (House Bill 2635) will allow port districts, under certain conditions, to provide consulting services to governments and public agencies in an effort to promote economic development. Both bills passed the Legislature and were signed into law.

Health care - Small steps forward

In addition to adopting legislation that helps small businesses purchase health insurance at a lower cost and provides a 50-cent per hour increase for home healthcare workers, we were hoping to make advances for other important health-care legislation.

- **Medical malpractice and liability reforms**

A sweeping tort reform package placing limits on lawsuits and caps on non-economic damages passed the Senate; we were hoping to vote on it in the House. Instead, the House Democrat majority responded by passing legislation which would do very little to help alleviate out-of-control lawsuits and skyrocketing malpractice insurance premiums.

From all of that legislation, two bills survived. One blocks lawsuits charging that a restaurant or fast-food outlet caused obesity. The other measure reduces tort judgment interest rates defendants pay when they lose an appeal. Those interest rates have been 12 percent for the past decade. The new law will tie them to a rate that is two percentage points above the 26-week Treasury Bill rate.

Washington is still far short of the malpractice and liability reforms needed to ensure continued affordable access to health care. We remain concerned that as malpractice insurance rates go higher, we could be losing more doctors and health-care providers, leaving patients to utilize expensive emergency room care. This is an important issue that must be addressed in the 2005 session.

- **Buying prescription drugs from Canada**

Hoping to shave millions from the state budget and help struggling seniors, the House passed a bill authorizing state agencies to buy prescription drugs at a discount from Canadian pharmacies. Unfortunately, the measure, which also needed the blessing of the federal government, died in the Senate.



East Valley High School student Stephanie Elkins came to Olympia for a day where she shadowed Rep. Mary Skinner to learn more about the legislative process.

Senior citizen property tax relief extended



We are pleased that the Legislature passed a bill that will qualify about 18,000 more senior citizens and retired disabled people for relief from the burden of high property taxes.

The bill increases income eligibility to \$40,000 for those seniors and disabled people who choose to defer part of their property taxes until the sale of their property. It also exempts the homeowner from all excess levies if their income is between \$30,001 and \$35,000. Those with lower incomes can exempt portions of regular property tax levies. In addition, it allows seniors to deduct Medicare insurance premiums from disposable income counted under the threshold.

**Contact the Yakima County
Assessor's office at
(509) 574-1100
to find out if you are eligible.**

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Keeping children safe from molesters



We supported House Bill 2400, the Child Protection Act of 2004, which makes it harder for sex offenders who victimize children to get treatment in lieu of prison time.

The original bill would have imposed tough mandatory sentences against child molesters and provided for treatment behind bars. When that was watered down, Jim supported an amendment in the House Appropriations Committee to make the measure stronger. Although that amendment was turned down, we worked with other lawmakers to ensure that the final bill would provide justice for victims and keep sex offenders from having a second chance to harm children.

Concerns with charter school legislation

The Legislature approved a bill to create charter schools, which would be independent from many state regulations. The measure allows the opening of 45 new charter schools over the next six years. We had great concerns that charter schools could end up competing for the same finite dollars that go to our public schools. We also felt that if fewer regulations are good for charter schools, why can't they also be good for our public school system? Instead of creating a new system, we believe the focus should be on strengthening our existing public schools. For those reasons, we did not support this legislation.

If at first you don't succeed. . .

The Legislature approved a measure that gives students up to four chances to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test. Under this bill, students must retake only the sections they did not successfully complete.



Rep. Jim Clements works with other Yakima County lawmakers, including Rep. Janéa Holmquist from the neighboring 13th District, to address issues important to our region.

Protecting our food supply

In response to the mad cow disease scare, we co-sponsored a measure that will help to protect our food supply. House Bill 2802 outlaws trade in live "downer" cows – those too weak or diseased to walk – to ensure they do not enter the beef supply. We also co-sponsored House Bill 2929, which gives meatpackers a temporary tax break until foreign countries lift their embargoes against American beef. Both bills passed the Legislature.

Governor vetoes primary election bill, limits your choices

The only thing more disappointing than the courts throwing out Washington's blanket primary system is the veto Gov. Locke stamped on the primary election bill passed by the Legislature. We struggled to replace the court-ousted blanket primary with something as near to it as possible. We wanted to preserve your choice without making you declare a party allegiance. The closest system we agreed to was a "Top 2" primary, in which the two people who get the most votes in September face off in November.

Also, realizing that it might be challenged in the courts, we provided a Montana-style fallback. This would have voters privately pick a single party's ballot in September and choose only among that party's candidates.

When the measure reached the governor's desk, he vetoed the Top 2 section, leaving the Montana-style party ballot as Washington's new primary system.

No new taxes – again

This session, the second of the Legislature's two-year term, lawmakers passed supplemental operating, capital and transportation budgets to make "mid-course corrections" in the corresponding spending plans we adopted in 2003. Adjustments were made in response to changing needs — like school enrollments or firefighting costs that were higher than expected.

The House's supplemental operating budget is developed by the powerful Appropriations Committee, of which Jim is a longtime member. Differences between it and the Republican-controlled Senate's version were finally settled, and the result is a good news-bad news plan. On the plus side, it doesn't require a tax increase, and the small increase in spending it allows will go to care for our state's most vulnerable citizens — those in nursing homes, on children's Medicaid, and with developmental disabilities. The extra funding also

will pay for roughly 3,000 new enrollments in higher education (good news for Yakima Valley Community College) to help students compete in the new economy.

On the minus side, it also doesn't leave much in reserve: under \$300 million, which is a bare minimum for dealing with emergencies, emerging needs and revenue changes between now and July 2005. Also, the extra spending in the new supplemental budget increases the expected budget deficit facing the next Legislature to an even \$1 billion — which means either cuts in services or new taxes to balance the 2005-07 budget.

The smaller supplemental budgets for capital improvements (construction) and transportation benefited greatly from the compromises struck by the House and Senate, and they passed with overwhelming support.

Pine Hollow Reservoir proposal continues progress

As Jim hoped, a favorable watershed assessment completed for the Department of Ecology in February helped him secure \$50,000 in the supplemental capital budget to continue looking into the feasibility of storing water taken from Ahtanum Creek off-stream at Pine Hollow Canyon. The assessment indicated the proposed reservoir would be able to store 25,000 acre-feet of water 95 percent of the time — water that would be used during the dry season to keep the streambed alive for the benefit of farms and fish.

Environmental standards have changed greatly in the 60-plus years since construction of the fifth of the five reservoirs in the Yakima River Basin. The volume of paperwork and lengthy timelines required for such a project these days prompted Jim to take a two-track approach. One track involves the drafting of an environmental impact statement using money secured in last year's operating budget; it started May 1 and is expected to take 8-12 months. The second track will use the allocation in this year's supplemental capital budget over that same period to analyze the costs of restoring habitat for salmon, waterfowl and other wildlife and constructing a dam to provide flood control, maintain in-stream flows and supply irrigation water.

Depending on cooperation among stakeholders — county, state, tribal and federal officials — Jim believes Pine Hollow could become a reality by the end of this decade. The next step would be to explore funding sources and seek \$1 million from the next Legislature for more pre-construction work.

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2004 Legislative Questionnaire Results

Thank you for responding to the survey we mailed in February. Your answers provided some important insight to the views on issues affecting the 14th District. We received 857 responses. Of those, 52 responded using our online survey on our web sites.

Here is how you and your neighbors responded.

Legislative priorities

1 Rank from 1 to 9 (1 being most important) the issues which are of greatest importance to you.

28% Economy and jobs	9% Education	2% Social services
23% No new taxes	7% Liability reform	2% Water storage
18% Affordable health care	2% Environment	1% Transportation

Taxes and spending

2 Washington's Constitution requires a 60 percent yes vote - also known as a "supermajority" - to pass public school district levies and bond issues. Educators want to lower the threshold for approval to a "simple majority," which is 50 percent + one vote. What would you prefer?

64% Keep the supermajority requirement for bond issues and levies.
21% Change the Constitution to allow the simple majority for bonds and levies.
15% Keep the supermajority for bonds; allow the simple majority for levies.

3 Lawmakers are looking at several options to help economic recovery and job creation. Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with these options.

A Increase small business tax credits	B Freeze the state's minimum wage	C Reform workers' compensation
82% agree	72% agree	82% agree
18% disagree	28% disagree	18% disagree
D Extend existing business tax credits	E Reduce regulatory red tape	
80% agree	84% agree	
20% disagree	16% disagree	

Public safety

4 The Department of Ecology reported 1,694 methamphetamine labs in Washington in 2002. In many of those labs, children were found. How should the Legislature handle this growing problem?

82% Make the manufacturing of meth a "strike" under the state's "Three Strikes" law.
14% Increase penalties, but do not make meth manufacturing a strike.
4% Current laws are working fine. No action is necessary.

Transportation

5 The Transportation Commission says studded tires cause \$10 million damage to our state's highways each year. It wants the Legislature to ban studded tires.

Do you use studded tires?

64% no 36% yes

Please mark one of the following:

37%	The Legislature should not ban studded tires, but instead pass legislation to impose a new fee on the sale of studded tires.
32%	The Legislature should ban studded tires.
31%	The Legislature should not ban studded tires and should use existing revenues to pay for road damage.

6 Should Washington driver's licenses be issued to people who cannot prove their identity?

98% no 2% yes

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Rep. Jim Clements

Agandas' stay in U.S. extended after receiving Legislature's support

The U.S. District Attorney in Spokane decided in mid April to extend, for 18 months, a humanitarian stay for three members of the Aganda family of Selah. Without the extension, Tomas and Judy Aganda and the youngest of their four children might already have been deported to their native Philippines.

It was great news for many, including Jim and Mary, who have been working on their constituents' behalf since last summer. They had secured the full support of the Legislature for the family by introducing a joint

memorial – a formal request to Congress – asking that the U.S. government allow the Agandas to remain in Selah, where they have lived since 1990. The measure passed unanimously. Gov. Locke also wrote to President Bush in support of the family. Shortly thereafter, at Jim's request, Congressmen Hastings and Nethercutt agreed to get involved in the family's case. Within days, the humanitarian stay was extended.

The extended stay will allow mother Judy Aganda to continue receiving treatment in Seattle for brain cancer. It also will enable the family to remain in the U.S. long enough for the Agandas' eldest daughter, a U.S. citizen who will turn 21 next year, to apply for a special visa that hopefully will lead to permanent residency for her parents and teenage sister.

We are here to serve you as well as represent you!

Although the 2004 legislative session is finished, we continue to work for you throughout the year. If you are having difficulties dealing with a state agency, we might be able to help. If you have a question about state government or a suggestion about future legislation, we invite you to contact us.

Representative Mary Skinner

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